

News from Ed Markey

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Massachusetts Seventh District
CONTACT: Mark Bayer or
Kate Reinhalter
(202) 225-2836

MARKEY HONORS 39TH ANNIVERSARY OF VOTING RIGHTS ACT, INTRODUCES BILL TO INCREASE YOUTH VOTER PARTICIPATION

Washington, D.C. - Rep. Edward J. Markey (D-MA), a senior member of the Energy and Commerce Committee, today released the following statement honoring the 39th Anniversary of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and urging passage of H.R. 4972, the "Gateway to Democracy Act," a bill he introduced to increase youth voter registration and participation.

"On August 6, 1965, President Lyndon Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act to ensure that all citizens would have equal access to the right to vote. The Act removed the authority of states to impose restrictions on who could vote in elections and guaranteed that all citizens of the United States regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, social status or personal wealth would have the opportunity to register to vote and go to the polls without fear.

"Unfortunately, the young people of our country consistently rank among the groups of citizens with low voting rates. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in the 2000 general election, only 45% of 18 to 24-year-olds were registered to vote and only 32% actually voted. This is why I have recently introduced H.R. 4972, the 'Gateway to Democracy Act,' a bill that will make voter registration easier and more convenient for young people.

Studies have shown that young adults often fail to turn out on Election Day simply because they are not registered to vote. Most states require registration prior to the election itself, so that it is too late to establish voter eligibility on Election Day.

"The voices of young people are critical to the health of our democracy. Although young people are only 25% of the current population, they are 100% of the future. Making it easy for young people to register to vote encourages them to begin taking part in our democracy as soon as they reach voting age.

"The Gateway to Democracy Act is a very simple idea. Currently, if you're 18 or older and you apply for a driver's license, you can also register to vote. But in most states, if you are under 18, you do not have the same opportunity to register while getting your driver's license. Thus, a 16 or 17-year-old typically must make a second trip to register after reaching voting age. This bill will allow people who are too young to vote to complete the paperwork necessary to vote when they get their drivers license. They will be eligible to vote only after reaching the legal minimum voting age.

“On this 39th anniversary we should reaffirm our commitment to goal of equal access and to ensure that all eligible voters have the opportunity to vote in their first election.”